**Adrienne Lorme**

**EDU 702.22**

**Fall 2010**

**Wiki Assignment # 1**

Action Research is a type of research where an individual or group investigates a theory or topic in need of a change. For this class, we are expected to conduct an action research on a current educational topic. In all action research, we first have to identify the problem and then propose a way to change this problem. The last steps are to collect data and then analyze the data (Midterm Project Rubric, 2010).

**Define The Problem:**

A topic of interest to me is literacy and deaf education. I was born with a hearing loss and there was a fear I would never learn how to read and write. I learned to read and write through an oral approach instruction combined with phonics. Twenty years later, the debate on how to teach literacy to hearing impaired students, continue. Sadly, many students with hearing impairments “Do not go on to develop age appropriate reading and writing abilities,” (Mayer, 2007). Children with hearing disabilities are often unable to read above a fourth grade level (Chaleff & Ritter, 2001). This causes frustration leading to a large number of hearing impaired students to fail or quit school altogether.

Educators argue that teachers have to change the way they teach literacy to hearing impaired students. Teachers must first understand that there are different levels of hearing loss, some more severe than others. The issue remains of what is the best approach for teaching literacy to these students. In truth, a student may have more limitations in reading instruction and language-acquisition because of how severe their hearing loss may or may not be. With that said, one approach will not be sufficient enough since students respond to each strategy differently. However, the strategies used in teaching literacy to the hearing impaired are under a lot of scrutiny. A vast majority of hearing impaired students are reading below level. Educators have to come up with better strategies before we continue to fail our students.

**Is it researchable?**

Deaf education has been a hot topic for centuries. New technology keeps coming out that helps assists the hearing impaired. In fact, hearing aides have become more digitalized. Hearing aides are now being programmed to better assist the hearing impaired by bringing sounds, and speech normally not heard, down to a level that can be heard. In other words, more experiences with spoken language are being created with the use of devices. As updated research and new technology emerges, we will continue to face challenges on how to approach literacy among the hearing impaired. In fact, some of the journals I have found disputes claims discovered in the early 90’s as well as practices that have become outdated. There is now a greater emphasis to teach phonics and speech recognition to the deaf. Both of which are vital in early literacy. I am finding a wealth of journals focusing on how early practices conducted in the 90’s and early 2000’s have led to low literacy rates among students with hearing impairments. Other journals examine different approaches as well as what makes them work or not.

**Prior Research**

There has been an extensive amount of research conducted, which test different strategies used in literacy instruction among the hearing impaired. I have found research conducted by **Gallaudet University** and **Georgia State University.**  Both universities looked at how students struggle with mastering speech, decoding texts and sometimes using sign language. Their studies argue that hearing impaired students are expected do more work in decoding texts than hearing children. I also found studies and responses to the ***Council for Exceptional Children, NCLB Act and IDEA ACT*** which insist educators of the hearing impaired need to follow an evidence-based practice when teaching literacy to the hearing impaired. One of the most interesting researches I found comes from Margaret Harris (2006). Harris looked at research and theories from over ten different researchers. She cross examined and analyzed each and every one of these theories finding pros and cons for them.

**Pros and Cons**

There are many different theories on how literacy should be taught to the hearing impaired. I have come across a wealth of journals arguing why one particular approach does or does not work. For instance, some educators stress the importance of a signed-approached to literacy (Chaleff and Ritter, 2001) while other argues it is not efficient. On the other hand, some educators believe in a strictly oral approach known as ***Oral-Manualism*** *(*Cannon, 2010). Those against Oral Manualism argue it demotes a child’s identity and does not allow them to develop a language of their own in order to communicate (*Hearing Impairment-School programs, Teaching Methods*).

**Current Instructional Strategies**

Fingerspelling is a strategy where hearing impaired students stretch out a word similarly to how hearing children sound out a word phonetically for meaning (Chaleff & Ritter, 2001). “It is a mnemonic or rehearsal strategy to retrieve a concept or simply a place holder for unfamiliar words to maintain fluency while reading,” (Chaleff & Ritter, 2001). This strategy is under scrutiny because students do not seem to use the word in signing or retelling. Students are found to be unable to construct meaning from the word they have Fingerspelled.

New focus has been on a phonemic approach with miscue instruction because it is said to help students acquire a better language-acquisition. Therefore, students would develop more skills that will allow them to decode written words as they are given more face-to-face interactions. In fact, most of the journals I obtained provide information regarding practical strategies and the reasons/how these strategies came about.

I recently came across a journal that mentions a **Bicultural-Bilingual Approach (**Evans, 2004**).** This approach is being transgressed into schools more and more. Mostly, a Bicultural-Bilingual approach provides students with the ability to learn about Deaf Culture while being able to learn literacy through ASL and/or English. In other words, it is supposed to help students find and embrace their identity within the Deaf Culture.

**Practioners and Theorists**

I cannot begin to talk about Language-Acquisition and literacy development without first mentioning Vygotsky. Vygotsky theorized that children use language as a tool for thinking. He argued that children use egocentric speech and the speech of others for problem solving and language acquisition (Slavin, 2006). Furthermore, Vygotsky argued that “the ability to think in a language and later read and write it has much to do with how well one can communicate in the first place,” (Mayer, 2007). Unfortunately, most children with hearing disabilities have difficulty using language and developing the ability to read because they have not acquired a face-to-face form of their spoken language (Mayer, 2007).

Cummins, like Vygotsky, investigated the relationship between literacy and language acquisition. Cummins designed the model of **Bilingual Language Instruction (**Cannon, 2010) under the assumption that children should learn American Sign Language as their first language and spoken English as a second. In other words, students would have to find a way to make ASL and English connect. In truth, ASL and English often do not work well together. “ASL and English do not share a phonological system that is remotely similar on many levels.” (Haptonstall-Nykaza & Schick, 2007).

How exactly are educators supposed to form this bridge among written, spoken and signed language? Practioners like Cheri Williams (2004) have tried out different strategies. Williams concluded that some of her lessons were not as up to par because of her inability to properly assess her students. She tried to use a Language-Acquisition approach but realized students were struggling with conceptualizing the text and expanding their vocabulary. Charlotte Evans (2004), another practitioner, tried to incorporate a Bicultural-Bilingual approach only to realize how inconsistent a bilingual approach can be.

**What is your proposed intervention? (Independent Variable). How will you define (construct) and measure your intervention? (Dependent Variable).**

I plan on observing two to three classes where different strategies are incorporated within the literacy lessons. Within a two-week time frame, data will be collected and students’ reading abilities will be assessed through classroom assignments and homework. This data will later be used to measure my intervention. Basically, I will record how students are responding to the literature daily. Afterwards, I plan on teaching the same lessons over a course of a week where I will switch to a different strategy not used in that particular classroom. Once again, I will use classroom assignments and homework to assess the students reading abilities. Then I will do a cross comparative on what methods students performed better with.

**Works Cited**

Cannon, J. (2010). Vocabulary Instruction Through Books Read in American Sign Language for English-Language Learners with Hearing Loss. *Communication Disorders Quarterly, Volume 31 (*Issue 2), 98-110.

Chaleff, C & Ritter, M. (2001). The Use of Miscue Analysis with Deaf Readers. *The Reading Teacher, Volume 55(*Issue 2), 190-200.

Evans, C. (2004). Literacy Development in Deaf Students: Case Studies in Bilingual Teaching and Learning. *American Annals of the Deaf, Volume 149(*Issue 1), 17-30.

Harris, M. (2006). Speech Reading and Learning to Read: A Comparison of 8-Year-Old Profoundly Deaf Children with Good and Poor Reading Ability.  *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, Volume 11(*Issue 2), 189-201.

Haptonstall-Nykaza, T & Schick, B. (2007). The Transition from Fingerspelling to English Print: Facilitating English Decoding. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, Volume 12(*Issue 2), 172-183.

*Hearing Impairment- School Programs Teaching Methods*. Retrieved September 14, 2010, from http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2039/Hearing-Impairment.html

Mayer, C. (2007). What Really Matters in the Early Literacy Development of Deaf Children. *Journal of* *Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, Volume 12*(Issue 4), 411-431.

Slavin, S. (2006) Educational Psychology : Theory and Practice. Boston: Pearson Incorporation.

Williams, C. (2004). Emergent Literacy of Deaf Children. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, Volume 9 (*Issue 4), 352-364.